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ABSTRACT

Designed to determine how well the student materials and teachers' guides of commercial spelling programs inform teachers of and reflect important spelling research, present management systems adaptable to individual student needs, provide strategies eliminating unnecessary or nonspelling instruction, and maximize the provisions for individual student differences, the Spelling Program Effectiveness Rating Scale was applied to 10 nationally known spelling programs and two programs designed on research-supported strategies. Evaluation results implied that (1) programs with research-supported and nonresearch-supported strategies differed widely; (2) teachers' guides generally failed to report on the literature of spelling, the criteria for word selection, or any empirical research on the effectiveness of their programs; (3) most manuals did not provide clear procedures for handling individual student differences; (4) student materials contained a wide variety of word study activities that were not supported as spelling strategies; and (5) only three of the evaluated programs received an overall rating that was higher on the positive scale than the negative scale. (MM)

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EVALUATION OF TWELVE ELEMENTARY SPELLING PROGRAMS USING THE SPELLING PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS RATING SCALE (SPERS)

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INTRODUCTION

While spelling research is one of the more heavily researched areas of the curriculum, there is an obvious lag in making the results of such research available to the classrrom practitioner (Horn, 1944; Fitzgerald, 1951; Campanela, 1962). If the reporting of research is limited to the professional journals and authors tend to avoid discussing research in the teachers guides of their published materials, it is possible for spelling programs to be selected by state textbook adoption committees and by local school districts without knowing the important relationship between the programs under consideration and the theoretical and empirical literature.

The purpose for the development of the Spelling Program Effectiveness Rating Scale -- SPERS -- was three fold. First, it would provide a guide to evaluate spelling programs on some bases other than quality of the bindings, methods used to disguise the grade level designations, scope and sequence, ease of teacher use, and the number of remedial and enrichment activites included. Second, because those in the position of evaluating and selecting spelling programs may not be knowledgable of strategies that are supported or not supported in the literature, the SPERS

might provide information which would heighten the evaluator's awareness of such literature. Finally, the use of a rating scale such as the SPERS would provide educators with a procedure for comparing programs with each other and with programs that represent high as well as low ratings on the Scale.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SPERS

Two questions were developed initially and used as guidelines for the items selected in the SPERS.

1. What information is included in a teacher's guide to a spelling program that:
   a) informs teachers of the theoretical and empirical literature on spelling instruction;
   b) reflects instructional strategies that are supported by the research; and
   c) provides for management systems that can be clearly followed and that will accommodate the individuality of the spelling process as well as the individual needs of students?
2. What strategies and procedures are included in the student materials that:
   a) reflect instruction that is supported or not supported in the literature;
   b) eliminate unnecessary, time consuming, or non-spelling instruction; and
   c) maximizes the provisions for individual differences?

Using the two questions as guidelines, 36 declarative statements were developed -- 12 for the teacher's guide and 24 for the materials used by the students. Each statement can be answered by circling a YES or NO in the columns to the right of the statement (Appendix A). If a YES response to an item is either supported by the literature or is a desireable attribute, the YES will appear in the Positive Scale column. On the other hand if a YES response to an item is considered to be a nonsupported strategy or a non-spelling activity, the YES will appear in the Negative Scale column. For example a response of YES to statement number 1 in Part II would result in a positive score for that program since research clearly supports the use of a pretest at the beginning of a lesson and prior to any instruction. On the other hand a response of YES to statement number 9 in Part II would result in a negative score for that program because the practice of merely writing spelling words three or four times without self-correction after each writing of the word has little or no support in the literature.

By responding to the 12 statements in Part I and the 24 statements in Part II, the evaluator can obtain a positive as well as a negative rating on (1) the manual of instructions, (2) the materials used by the student, and (3) the overall program. Each item is awarded two points. The maximum

rating is 24 on Part I, 48 on Part II, or a total of 72.

EVALUATION RESULTS OF 12 SPELLING PROGRAMS

Twelve spelling programs were selected for the study. Ten programs were selected because they were considered to be nationally known, had a large number of sales, and were usually submitted to state textbook adoption committees for consideration. Two rather obscure programs were also selected because they claimed to be designed strictly on research-supported strategies -- Curriculum Associates and Educational Services.

The positive ratings, negative ratings, and overall ratings for each of the 12 programs are illustrated in Table 1. It should be noted that the two obscure programs identified above received the highest ratings in all three categories. The one program believed to have the largest number of sales (not substantiated) received the lowest ratings in all three categories. The 12 programs seem to be clustered into three groups, particularly when only the students materials are taken into consideration. The first cluster of two programs (Curr. Assoc. and Educ. Services) have ratings substantially higher than all other programs -- in all three categories.

The second cluster of five programs (Follett, HBJ, Laidlaw, ABC, and Scott Foresman) have positive ratings between 24

and 28 ($\bar{X}$ = 25.6) on the student materials and a range of 20 to 24 ($\bar{X}$ = 22.4) on the Negative Scale. In this group of programs there were nearly as many negative as there were positive features with regard to the student materials. On the other hand these same programs rated poorly on the teacher's guides with a mean positive rating of 5.2 and a mean negative rating of 18.8.

The third cluster consists of five programs receiving significantly higher scores on the Negative Scale than on the Positive Scale (Economy, Harper and Row, Silver Burdett, Rand McNally, and McGraw-Hill). The range of scores on the Positive Scale was 8 to 18 ($\bar{X}$ = 15.6) while the range was 30 to 40 ($\bar{X}$ = 32.4) on the Negative Scale -- when considering the student materials. For an item-by-item analysis refer to Table 2.

DISCUSSION

If the SPERS reflects a realistic approach to the evaluation of spelling programs, the following implication might be drawn:

1. There appears to be wide differences among programs when research supported and nonresearch supported strategies are considered.

2. Teacher's guides for the most part fail to report on the literature of spelling, the criteria used in the selection of words for the various levels of their programs,

and the emiprical research that may have been done on the effectiveness of their programs. About the only research reported is that related to varification studies and other field work used to work out "bugs" in the program. This varifies Fitzgerald's (1951) claim that "results of research and experimentation were not readily available to the teacher (p. 2-3)."

3. Although publishers will discuss making provisions for individual differences among students and recognize its importance, they continue to leave out clearly delineated procedures that a teacher can follow to provide for individual differences such as the use of initial placement tests, pre-testing for each lesson prior to instruction, self-pacing, periodic recycling through lessons when needed, and models of alternative program management to enable teachers to use ability grouping, peer-teaching, and individual self-study. In reality most manuals, by their superficial treatment of individual differences, encourage a 5-day lesson cycle, whole class instruction, disregard for previous knowledge of the vocabulary, and the study of all words by all students whether needed or not.

4. Student materials seem to contain a wide variety of "fluff" activities involving word study. While these activities may by useful in a broader "language arts" sense, few of them are clearly supported as spelling strategies. Most programs

continue to encorporate practices such as linguistic groupings (sound or letter patterns), word definitions, cloze exercises, dictionary study, and the learning of spelling generalizations as well as exceptions -- all of which are non-spelling activities. The most clear-cut strategy of all -- Fitzgerald's (1951) look, say, visualize, write, and self-correct -- is usually explained on the first page of the student's book but never referred to again neither in the teacher's guide nor in the student's material.

5. Only three programs evaluated received a higher overall rating on the positive scale than on the negative scale (Curriculum Associates, Educational Services, and Follett).

This might be interpreted to mean that the more widely-used programs spend considerably more time with non-spelling instruction than with instruction that is considered to improve spelling achievement. Perhaps Christine and Hollingsworth (1966) were correct when they suggested that proper spelling strategies could mean that students could achieve the same results in half the time.

CONCLUSIONS

Petty stated "that much has been learned but the knowledge has not been used (1969, p. 79). Christine and

Hollingsworth(1966) made a similar observation when they wrote that "Many studies concerning spelling instruction have been made in the twentieth century, yet many pupils have learned to spell incorrectly(p. 565)".

We have often wondered whether the lag between research and practice could be attributed to publishers' concern for sales rather than for what is truth. Perhaps the availability of the SPERS will help to close this gap by (1) providing a means of evaluating programs based on the literature rather than on packaging, (2) educating teachers through this evaluation process, and (3) raising spelling literacy because of a more logical selection of instructional materials.

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TABLE 1. MEAN SCORES OF 12 SPELLING PROGRAMS IN THE THREE CATEGORIES OF THE SPELLING PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS RATING SCALE - SPERS

SPELLING PROGRAM	TEACHER'S GUIDES		STUDENT MATERIALS		COMBINED RATING	
	POSITIVE SCALE	NEGATIVE SCALE	POSITIVE SCALE	NEGATIVE SCALE	POSITIVE SCALE	NEGATIVE SCALE
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES	22	2	48	0	70	2
CURRICULUM ASSOCIATES	20	4	40	8	60	12
FOLLETT	10	14	28	20	38	34
HARCOURT BRACE	4	20	26	22	30	42
LAIDLAW	2	22	26	22	28	44
AMERICAN BOOK	4	20	24	24	28	44
SCOTT FORESMAN	6	18	24	24	30	42
ECONOMY	4	20	18	30	22	50
HARPER AND ROW	14	10	18	30	32	40
SILVER BURDETT	2	22	18	30	20	52
RAND MCNALLY	4	20	16	32	20	52
MCGRAW - HILL	2	22	8	40	10	62
MEAN SCORES	7.8	16.2	24.5	23.5	32.3	39.7

(1) Programs are arranged in rank order based on the Positive Scale For Student Materials.
(2) Maximum score for Teacher's Guides = 24
(3) Maximum score for Student Materials = 48
(4) Maximum score for Combined Rating = 72

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF RESPONSES ON THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SCALE FOR EACH OF THE 36 ITEMS ON THE SPERS (N = 12)

Description of Items on the SPERS	Positive Scale N=12	Negative Scale N=12
Teacher's Guide - 12 Items		
1. Cites research on spelling	Yes= 3	No= 9*
2. Guide contains bibliography	Yes= 2	No= 10*
3. Research reported on that program	Yes= 2	No= 10*
4. Source of vocabulary identified	Yes= 10*	No= 2
5. Criteria for word placement identified	Yes= 1	No= 11*
6. Initial placement test	Yes= 3	No= 9*
7. Instructions on individualizing	Yes= 3	No= 9*
8. Periodic testing of long-term memory	Yes= 8*	No= 4
9. Misspelled words carried forward for study	Yes= 4	No= 8*
10. Charts matching rules w/ specific lessons	No= 5	Yes= 7
11. Alternative management strategies	Yes= 4	No= 8*
12. Suggestions on time spent in spelling	Yes= 2	No= 10*
MEAN RESPONSES ON TEACHER'S GUIDE	$\bar{X}$ = 3.9	$\bar{X}$ = 8.1
Student Materials - 24 Items		
1. Pretest prior to any instruction	Yes= 5	No= 7
2. Words presented in column form	Yes= 12*	No= 0
3. Words grouped by sound or letter patterns	No= 1	Yes= 11*
4. Words grouped by frequency of use	Yes= 3	No= 9*
5. "Look-say-write-correct" is explained	Yes= 10*	No= 2
6. "Look-say-write" is found in all lessons	Yes= 5	No= 7

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Description of Items on the SPERS	Positive Scale N=12	Negative Scale N=12
7. Concentrate only on misspelled words	Yes= 3	No= 9*
8. Rules stated/implied in each lesson	No= 2	Yes= 10*
9. Write words 3 or more time	No= 12*	Yes= 0
10. Regular written dictation-self correction	Yes= 6	No= 6
11. Wd. visualizing activities	Yes= 4	No= 8*
12. Meanings of words, prefixes, suffixes, etc.	No= 3	Yes= 9*
13. Cloze activities, filling in blanks	No= 2	Yes= 10*
14. Words written in isolation on final test	Yes= 10*	No= 2
15. Sentence writing on final test	No= 9*	Yes= 3
16. Trans. dictionary spelling on final test	No= 11*	Yes= 1
17. Writing wds. in sent./creative writing	Yes= 5	No= 7
18. Studying "hard spots" in words	No= 10*	Yes= 2
19. Lessons discuss exceptions to rule in the lesson	No= 7	Yes= 5
20. Translate non-traditional to traditional spelling	No= 11*	Yes= 1
21. Handwriting-letter formation practice	No= 5	Yes= 7
22. Dictionary practice	No= 3	Yes= 9*
23. Misspelled wds. carried forward and tested	Yes= 4	No= 8*
24. Wds. added from other sources	Yes= 4	No= 8*
MEAN RESPONSES ON STUDENT MATERIALS	$\bar{X}$ = 6.1	$\bar{X}$ = 5.9
MEAN RESPONSES, ALL 36 ITEMS	$\bar{X}$ = 5.4	$\bar{X}$ = 6.6

APPENDIX A

SPELLING PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS RATING SCALE (SPERS)

Elton G. Stetson, Ed.D. and Frances J. Boutin, Ed.D.

Name of Program Evaluated _____ Level Evaluated _____

Publisher _____ Pub. Date _____ Evaluator _____

PART I. EVALUATION OF THE TEACHER'S GUIDE

Instructions: Using the teacher's guide or manual of instructions, respond to each of the statements below by circling the YES or NO in the columns to the right.

Statements Concerning the Teacher's Guide	Positive Scale	Negative Scale
1. Manual contains a review of the literature on instructional strategies in spelling that are supported by research as well as those that are not supported.	YES	(NO)
2. Manual includes a bibliography of research on spelling instruction.	YES	(NO)
3. Manual describes research that has been completed on the effectiveness of that program. Field studies to work out "bugs" in the program, number of copies sold, or number of editions printed does not count.	YES	(NO)
4. Manual clearly identifies the specific sources of the vocabulary used in the program.	(YES)	NO
5. Manual further identifies the criteria used to determine the specific levels of the program in which each vocabulary was placed.	YES	(NO)
6. Manual contains a placement or competency test that is to be given at the beginning of the year or program to determine whether a student is (a) competent at that level and needs instruction at a higher level, (b) at the propor level, or (c) should be placed at a lower level.	YES	(NO)

Sample

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	Positive Scale	Negative Scale
7. Manual contains specific instructions on how to individualize the program so that students within the same class can work on different lessons or different levels of the program.	YES	(NO)
8. Manual includes word dictation tests to be administered periodically (every 9 or 18 weeks or so) that test long-range retention of words previously taught. Review lessons do not count.	(YES)	NO
9. Manual provides specific instructions on how to (a) carry misspelled words forward that were spelled incorrectly on the final lesson test and (b) study and retesting of words. [Both a and b must be included to circle YES]	YES	(NO)
10. Manual contains a chart identifying the many phoneme-grapheme associations covered in the program along with references to the specific lessons where instruction is available on that sound/letter pattern.	NO	(YES)
11. Manual provides clearly explained details on managing the program in ways other than the traditional 3-day or 5-day lesson cycle involving the entire class -- such as ability grouping, peer teaching, or individual self-study.	YES	(NO)
12. Manual discusses the specific amount of time that should be spent each day or each week. [Research concludes that 60-75 minutes per week is optimum]	(YES)	NO

SCORING PART I

IA. TOTAL WORDS CIRCLED ON EACH SCALE [Maximum Score = 12]	3	9
	x 2	x 2
IB. TOTAL RATING FOR TEACHER'S GUIDE [Multiply numbers in IA by 2]	6	18

Sample

PART II. EVALUATION OF STUDENT MATERIALS

Instructions: Randomly select four lessons (not review lessons). Read each statement below, evaluate each of the four lessons, and circle the YES or the NO based on the following criteria:

Circle the YES if the statement applies or can be found in two or more of the four lessons.

Circle the NO if the statement does not apply or the strategy is not found in the lessons.

Note: Activities that are considered "optional" or extra work and not part of the regular program should not be considered.

Statements Concerning the Student Materials	Positive Scale	Negative Scale
1. A pretest is always administered at the beginning of the lesson prior to instruction.	YES	(NO)
2. Words to be learned are presented initially in a list or column (in isolation) and not contained in phrases or sentences.	(YES)	NO
3. Words in the lessons all contain a common sound pattern (e.g., the long /ā/ sound) or a common letter pattern (e.g., -at: bat, etc.)	NO	(YES)
4. Words are placed together in the same lesson according to their frequency or use rather than according to any sound or letter pattern.	YES	(NO)
5. At the beginning of the book prior to the first lesson, instructions are provided to the student on how to study words independently. [e.g., look at the word, say the word, cover and pronounce the word, cover and write the word, uncover and check spelling]	(YES)	NO
6. Each lesson includes an exercise or provides time for student self-study of words as described in number 5 above.	YES	(NO)
7. Students are taught to concentrate their study efforts only on those words missed during the pretest rather than to study all words.	YES	(NO)
8. Lessons tend to state or imply a specific rule or generalization in spelling.	NO	(YES)

Sample

	Positive Scale	Negative Scale
9. There are specific directions for the student to write each word in isolation two or more times for practice.	(NO)	YES
10. At least once during each lesson students are directed to (a) write words dictated by teacher or peer and (b) self-correct each word [Both a and b must be present to say yes]	YES	(NO)
11. There are activities that center on the student visualizing the word to develop imagery through activities such as studying the configuration of the word [c l u t e], looking for large word parts such as prefixes/suffixes, or anagrams.	(YES)	NO
12. There are activities involving the study of word meanings such as etiology or word origins, looking up meanings in the dictionary, multiple meanings, meanings of prefixes or suffixes.	NO	(YES)
13. There are activities in which the student completes sentences, fills in missing words within sentences or other context clue or cloze activities.	NO	(YES)
14. On the final test for each lesson, the student writes the words in isolation or in columns from dictation by the teacher or peer.	(YES)	NO
15. The final test for each lesson includes sentence dictation in which the student must write the entire sentence.	NO	(YES)
16. The final test for each lesson includes words or sentences written in phonetic or dictionary form which the student must translate to regular spelling.	(NO)	YES
17. There are activities in the lessons requiring the student to write spelling words in some meaningful or creative way such as making up phrases or sentences or stories using the words.	(YES)	NO
18. The lessons contain difficult words or demon words containing "hard spots" in which the hard spot is circled or underlined and the student is asked to study the hard spot.	(NO)	YES

Sample

	Positive Scale	Negative Scale
19. Lessons include words considered to be exceptions to the rule or generalization explained in the lessons.	NO	(YES)
20. There are activities in the lessons requiring the student to translate non-regular spellings to regular spellings [e.g., sound spelling, mixed-up letters].	(NO)	YES
21. There are handwriting activities that ask students to practice forming letters/words.	NO	(YES)
22. There are activities involving dictionary practice such as alphabetizing, diacritical markings, etc.	NO	(YES)
23. Provisions are made for students to copy words that are misspelled on the final lesson test and to take a test over those words at some later date.	YES	(NO)
24. Provisions are made for the student to add words to their spelling list that come from sources other than the spelling program it self.	YES	(NO)

SAMPLE

SCORING PART II

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
IIA. TOTAL WORDS CIRCLED ON EACH SCALE [Maximum Score = 24]	9 x 2	15 x 2
IIB. TOTAL RATINGS FOR STUDENT MATERIALS [Maximum Score = 48]	18	30

COMPOSITE SCORE, PART I AND II

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
IIIA. Record Total Rating for the Teacher's Guide [Item IB : Maximum = 24]	6	18
	+	+
IIIB. Record Total Ratings For Student Materials [Item IIB : Max. = 48]	18	30
	=	=
IIIC. TOTAL POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE RATINGS FOR GUIDE & MATERIALS [Maximum Score = 72]	24	48